

the promise



Uncle Junior Sings to Our Vets!

IN THIS ISSUE: New Patient-Centered Care Office Opens | Choice Act expands Range | **The Big Story:** Physical Therapy Clinic gets a much needed reno



From the Director's Desk

Spring in the Hudson Valley is an amazing time of year. We are past a harsh winter and now look forward to the flowers in bloom and warmer temperatures.

The change in seasons, however, does not change our continued focus on patient-centered care. We continue to make strides in ensuring the Veteran is at the center of everything we do. As a part of that, I've created a new office of Patient-Centered Care office to focus on ensuring everyone on my team is partnered with our Veterans for their care. You'll get a bit of insight from that office in a story on Page 6.

The Veterans Choice initiative is well underway at VA Hudson Valley. We've trained our team on the program and built the processes needed to ensure we're carrying out good service, including identifying "choice champi-



ons" who ensure we do things right. We've also hired two people and are hiring a third to support our Veterans Choice efforts. That said, there has been an enhancement to the Choice Act that changes how VA tallies mileage. We talk about that in this issue.

Our quarterly town hall meetings have shed light on a number of issues from travel vouchers to signage within our facilities. In meeting and listening to more than 165 Veterans from across the region, we've aggressively addressed challenges across the spectrum. Our next town

hall is scheduled June 13 in Carmel, N.Y., near one of our outpatient clinics. Once we have the specifics on where, we'll let you know.

After two years of hammering, painting and labor, our renovated Physical Rehabilitation Clinic at Castle Point Medical Center is receiving rave reviews. My team there has done a remarkable job ensuring Veteran privacy and creating an environment where our Veterans can rehabilitate without worry or inconvenience. We a full feature on Page 10.

As I continue to make the rounds at our campuses, outpatient clinics and in the community, I look forward to engaging our Veterans on their care and other issues, and learn about how VA Hudson Valley can grow and flourish this Spring.

Margaret B. Caplan
Director

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

1 CALL
can make a difference.

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

Confidential chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net or text to 838255

VA Works to Expand Choice Program Eligibility

Eligibility criteria for 40 miles calculation would change to driving distance



WASHINGTON -- In order to expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that it will change the calculation used to determine the distance between a Veteran's residence and the nearest VA medical facility from a straight line distance to driving distance. The policy change will be made through regulatory action in the coming weeks. The Veterans Choice Program was authorized by the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014.

"VA has worked very quickly to implement the Veterans Choice Program and we appreciate the constructive feedback shared by Veterans and our

partners to help us improve service to Veterans," said Secretary Robert McDonald. "We've determined that changing the distance calculation will help ensure more Veterans have access to care when and where they want it. VA looks forward to the ongoing support of our partners as we continue to make improvements to this new program."

The method of determining driving distance will be through distance as calculated by using a commercial product. The change is expected to roughly double the number of eligible Veterans.

The Veterans Choice Program is a new, temporary benefit that allows eligible Veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or trav-

eling to a VA facility. Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program should call 1-866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment. Since the Choice Program went into effect on November 5, 2014, more than 45,000 medical appointments have been scheduled.

VA is enhancing its health care system and improving service delivery to better serve Veterans and set the course for long-term excellence and reform. VA has made significant progress in various areas of the legislation, such as extending the Assisted Living/Traumatic Brain Injury Pilot program and Project Arch, to expand timely access to high-quality health care for Veterans.

Patient Centered



*A pinpoint focus on Veteran service drives newly created **Patient Centered Care** Office at VA Hudson Valley*

Dr. Mona Mittal and Cathy Curtin, RN, (pictured) are heading up the Patient-Centered Care office for VA Hudson Valley. They took a few minutes to talk about how the office's work will affect Veterans and what it means for the care provided every day in its medical centers and clinics:

Q: How do you think an office like this can help the shift toward patient-centered care?

A: Establishing an office like this allows us to align the resources necessary to successfully take on the tremendous undertaking of transforming our entire organization (and sustaining that transformation) to one that is both patient centered and employee centered. An office enables consistent, reliable communication between front line staff, Veterans and their families, management, and leadership to ensure everyone is on the same page and moving towards a common goal. This is key to ensuring our services are well

integrated and meeting the needs of our Veterans.

Q: What do you see as your No. 1 priority?

A: Our number one priority is to ensure our dedicated staff continue to have the knowledge, skills, energy, and enthusiasm to continually listen and respond to the voice of the Veteran in all that they do. In order to deliver care that is truly patient centered, staff must feel valued and appreciated. VA Hudson Valley staff have always been and continue to be extremely mission-driven. Ensuring strong employee morale is vital to the delivery of patient centered care.

Q: What are the challenges to standing up a new venture like this?

A: One challenge is that most of us feel we are already providing patient centered care. While we agree that individual providers and staff have the best interest of Veterans in mind, we are trying to develop a system wide approach to

patient centered care that is continually driven by what matters most to the Veteran. Another challenge is the belief of many that this initiative is just the new “flavor of the month,” which is definitely not the case. The philosophy and principles of patient centered care mark a historic transformation in way we deliver care to patients, both in the VA and in general.

Q: How do VA Hudson Valley employees factor into this effort?

A: If staff do not feel valued and appreciated they will lose the enthusiasm for why they entered health care in the first place. Without staff there can be no patient centered care; they are an integral part of the process. Without staff who have a passion for what they do we cannot have patient centered care. Patient centered care becomes reality when it comes from the hearts of VA employees.

Q: What’s the one thing you can accomplish immediately that will have impact on our Veterans?

A: Asking Veterans what matters to them and then putting their feedback into action whether it be a change to their care plan or to the way we do business.

Q: What sort of tools and resources do you have in order to accomplish this job?

A: We are partnered with VHA Region 4 Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation Field Implementation Team, which serves as our own personal consultant on furthering this mission. Through this partnership, we have direct access to best practices and toolkits throughout the nation, as well as various staff engagements and trainings to enhance the experience and practice of care. We also have the facility-wide organization assessment completed in September of 2013 where we heard the voices of our staff and Veterans on where we are doing well and where there are opportunities for improvement. This gives us a launching pad for where to direct our efforts. We are also fortunate to have a director who is well experienced in and passionate about patient centered care. Ms. Caplan has been a leader in the delivery of PCC at Wilkes-Barre (Pa.) and continues to bring her expertise and enthusiasm for this effort to VA Hudson Valley.

Q: Where do you want to be one year from now?

A: A year from now, we would like to have 100 percent of our staff trained in patient centered care.

Q: At the end of the day, what do you want Veterans do say about the work you are doing?

A: Coming to VA Hudson Valley is like coming home. The staff there do everything they can to ensure I have the best possible experience from the moment I walk in the door to when I leave, and it doesn't stop there. They listen to my needs, understand me, and genuinely care about my health and well-being. With the help of VA Hudson Valley, I am able to reach goals I never imagined possible..

I CARE in Action



VA Hudson Valley Police Officer **Art Fitzgerald** talks about his commitment to the I CARE, Veterans and the value of integrity:

“Integrity is very important to me as a VA employee and a police officer to always do the best I can to the best of my abilities.

The Vets who have risked all that they have deserve the very best from me and my fellow VA employees.”



Keep up with Veteran-centered events at VA Hudson Valley!

We post all our Veteran-centered events at our public web site!

<http://www.hudsonvalley.va.gov/calendar.asp>

catching up

Events & Happenings from the past Quarter

Clothing donation Helps Veterans

Many thanks to the Westchester (N.Y.) County Bar Association, which dropped off about 100 brand-new coats, scarves, hats and gloves to our Montrose campus clothing store Jan. 20. Since the start of winter, the association put collection boxes in the county courts and town halls to gather donations. The store serves about 250 people per month and as the winter rolls on, their donations will be helpful. Shown in the photo are James L. Hyer, Caitlin Baranowski (foreground), and Mary Ellen McCourt, all representing WCBA, standing with Yvette Rodriguez-Cacho, our volunteer services



Patriotic Medley

Singers from USO "Liberty Bells" Troupe in New York City sing to veterans February 11 as part of the National Salute to Veteran Patients week. A number of activities spanned the week-long observance, arranged by VA Hudson Valley's Voluntary Services staff. According to the USO web site, "The USO Liberty Bells were born in the World War II era of the Andrews Sisters and their "The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" ... The show troupe still performs songs like "Jump, Jive and Wail" but also incorporates hits from every decade, all the way up to today's Grammy-winning hits. The troupe is a frequent guest at VA Hudson Valley and we cannot thank them enough for their support. (Photo/Barbara LaColla)

NY Senator Visit

New York Senator Kristin Gillibrand visits and delivers Valentine's Day cards to Veterans from the VA Hudson Valley Community Living Centers Feb. 13. The senator was joined by state and local community leaders spending time with Veterans and thanking them for their service. (Photo/ Barbara LaColla/VA Hudson Valley Public Affairs)



Uncle Junior drops by!

Dominic Chianese, the chairperson for the 2015 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Salute to Veteran Patients Week, paid a visit to the Montrose and Castle Point campuses of the VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, New York March 12. Chianese played music with Veterans undergoing treatment for PTSD at the Montrose, N.Y. campus; and visited Veterans in the community living centers. Mr. Chianese, a native of The Bronx, N.Y., is an actor and musician known for his film and television work in All The President's Men, Dog Day Afternoon, The Godfather Part II, as well as his role as Corrado "Uncle Junior" Soprano on The Sopranos. (Photo/Barbara LaColla)





5 Tips For ...

Better Beneficiary Travel Vouchers

1

Veteran information should be up date.

There are two ways to receive the the benefit:

- 1.) Electronic funds transfer in 3 to 5 business days (info should be kept up to date!), or
- 2.) By check. This takes longer for Veteran to receive payment, up to 2 or 3 weeks after the appointment.

2

The Veteran needs to sign voucher.

If more than one vouchers, then all vouchers need to be signed. To save the time, he or she can complete VA Form 3542 which will act as a signature card so that if signature is missing from the voucher payment, it can still be processed.

3

A VA Hudson Valley Health Administration Service certifying official needs to sign all vouchers, and the signature should be legible. So, be sure to follow-up to ensure our folks have signed the Veteran's voucher. Be sure to sign in blue or black ink in the designated location.

4

Vouchers are audited for completeness and returned to originator if not complete. So, fill in all the blanks and, if a blank is not applicable, where possible, mark "N/A." Be sure to write legibly so clerks can make accurate payment. A completed voucher is a happy voucher!

5

Vouchers are audited, and if everything is found to be in compliance, then payment is made. If a signature is missing, mandatory fields not completed or others errors found then the voucher will need to be returned, and this will significantly delay payment to the Veteran.

Signs of the Times

As a result of direct input from quarterly town hall meetings, Castle Point elevators and hallways have new signage helping Veterans get to their appointments inside the hospital. Veterans said finding clinics and other offices could be a challenge and that some of the signs were confusing. A broad-range signage initiative is also underway and is also a focus item under the new "MyVA" plan unveiled by VA Secretary Bob McDonald. (Photo/Barbara LaColla)





Hospitality in the Bronx

Margaret B. Caplan, VA Hudson Valley Medical Center Director, and Dr. Erik Langhoff, James J. Peters VA Medical Center Director, shake hands at the opening of the VA Hudson Valley Veterans hospitality suite at the Bronx VA Jan. 12. The suite is in place to ease navigation for VA Hudson Valley Veterans who have appointments in the Bronx. Veterans check in with a clerk at the hospitality desk, and arrangements are made for the Veteran to get the appointment. Veterans can wait in the suite for their appointment or, when finished, can wait for the shuttle to return to VA Hudson Valley. The suite includes a refrigerator, a microwave, free coffee and water. (Courtesy photo)

New web resource focuses on Vets with PTSD

By Hans Petersen

WASHINGTON -- *AboutFace* is a VA website dedicated to improving the lives of Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. It's where Veterans can learn about PTSD, explore treatment options and, most importantly, hear real stories from other Veterans and their family members and get advice from clinicians who have treated thousands of cases of PTSD.

Major Joshua Brandon has been an infantry officer with the U.S. Army since 2002 and he has PTSD. Difficult memories were triggered when he was driving to the grocery store in Tennessee and he would smell the smoke from backyard fires.

"I started looking for threats in all directions. My adrenaline would

spike. I had to pull over and talk myself out of it."

Major Brandon has the courage to talk about his experience and how VA has helped him with his PTSD on *AboutFace*. Learn about posttraumatic stress disorder from Veterans who have experienced it. Hear their stories. Find out how treatment turned their lives around.

You'll see other Veterans from different eras and diverse backgrounds, of all ages and experiences willing to share their stories to help other Veterans with PTSD.

"I'm enjoying life again. I'm having fun," Brandon said.

It's just one of the many resources available to help Veterans learn about PTSD and to seek treatment.

As Dr. Sonya Norman says, "A

key message I want to get across is that effective treatments are available for PTSD and they help people recover and feel better." Dr. Norman is VA's PTSD Consultation Program Director with the National Center for PTSD.

Dr. Norman describes how, "Veterans tell me 'I'm enjoying life again. I'm having fun. I love holding my baby.'"

There are several effective treatments for PTSD and information about these can be found here.

Lt. General James B. "Jim" Vaught, who served in the U.S. Army from 1945 to 1983, will tell you they called it "battle fatigue" when he fought in the Korean War. And anybody can have it.

"PTSD, it doesn't give a damn about your rank. It's going to knock hell out of you every now and then."



... And There's an VA App For PTSD, too

PTSD Coach was designed for Veterans and military Service Members who have, or may have, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This app provides users with education about PTSD, information about professional care, a self-assessment for PTSD, opportunities to find support, and tools that can help users manage the stresses of daily life with PTSD. It is available via the App Store and Google Play.

THE BIG STORY



Movin' on Up

Castle Point physical rehabilitation clinic finishes remodel

By Jason Tudor
VA Hudson Valley Public Affairs

Duffy Violante climbs onto a recumbent exercise cycle, looking around the newly expanded and re-modeled physical rehabilitation clinic at VA Hudson Valley Health Care System's Castle Point campus.

The 14-year Navy Veteran had been to the clinic 12 years ago to fix an ailing wrist, but that was long before upgrades added some 1,200 more square feet, new equipment and more space for Veterans to get their care. His first reaction to the refurbished area was a simple one.

"Wow," said Violante, who now gets care at the clinic for a heart condition. "It's just so clean and put together so well. They really did a great job."

September 2014 marked the completion of the project that cost about \$790,000. While Veterans have been using the facility since then, the Castle Point physical rehabilitation team hasn't had a chance to show off the space to fellow employees. An open house Thursday, Jan. 29, will fix that.

Maura Timm, the physical medicine and rehabilitation supervisor, runs the clinic. A VA employee for 14 years, Timm said the expansion was

essential to serve her clinic's Veteran clientele, which went from 895 to about 1,800 per month.

"We outgrew our space," Timm, a New Windsor, N.Y., native said. "We got more clients. It got busier and the space we had become much smaller."

Timm said staff members were given full reign on proposed changes. Consulting with the VA Hudson Valley Art Therapist Rosemarie Rogers, the staff provided input on everything from the flooring to the paint on the walls.

Clinic staff input also allowed them to ensure Veterans had more



Violante stays in shape at the Physical Therapy Clinic at VA Hudson Valley.
(Photo/Jason Tudor/VA Hudson Valley)

space and privacy while they went through therapy, including adding frosted glass partitions between client therapy spaces. With more equipment, the new square footage came in handy. The space also allowed for a walking track inside the clinic.

“We were walking with Veterans around in the hallway, often times in their hospital clothes and while the hallways were crowded, and that just wasn’t practical,” Timm said. “Having the dedicated space for the walking track is great.”

That walking track frames a modular space where therapy tables, exercise equipment, weight sets and more dot the room. There is a waiting area for Veterans and a bolstered shared work space for clinic staff members.

Katie Galderisi, an occupational therapist who’s worked for the VA for 10 years, said the reaction from Veterans was the measurement of success on the project.

“They all think that it’s fantastic. The environment is more spacious and gives the Veterans more room for treatments,” said Galderisi, who said Veterans cited the open floor plan and views of the Hudson River as big pluses. “Having this new space helps us further put the Veteran at the center of care.”

Key to the renovation, Timm

“They’ve really gone above and beyond with this.” – Violante

said, was Veteran privacy. “They’re more comfortable when laying on the treatment mats. That has been fantastic,” said Timm, also noting that each space went from about five feet wide to about eight feet wide and include frosted glass partitions. “The Veterans are very pleased. I continue to get a lot of positive feedback from them.”

Next for the clinic, Timm said, is fine tuning. “We are still completing some functional fine tuning that comes from working in the space. We will add more to the décor and make the space better for the Vets.”

Having more space was also a plus to Kathy Johnstone, the lead physical therapist at Castle Point who has worked for the VA for 16 years.

“I just love it!” said Johnstone, adding that having the entire clinic one side of the hallway instead of two makes a big difference. “It was important to update the space. It looks and

feels more like a therapy and rehab space.

“It just such a positive space for the Veterans,” Johnstone, a Hazel Park, Mich., native said continued. “They all come in and go, ‘Wow. This space is great!’ so they come with a positive attitude and they enjoy their time here.”

Violante, a Girard, Ohio native, is back at the Castle Point clinic starting an exercise program for a heart issue. As he ended a session on the recumbent bike, he reflected on the old versus the new.

“Things have melded together. Before, they were had occupational therapy on one side of the hall and physical therapy was on another. It wasn’t as cohesive. Now it’s gelled together,” Violante said. “They’ve really gone above and beyond with this. I’ve seen continual improvement at this hospital. I love the VA system and I get the best care I could ask for.”

(This article is also available online at: [http://www.hudsonvalley.va.gov/ HUDSONVALLEY/features/](http://www.hudsonvalley.va.gov/HUDSONVALLEY/features/))

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System

On the Web at

www.HudsonValley.va.gov

On Facebook at

www.FaceBook.com/VAHudsonValley

On Twitter at

www.Twitter.com/VAHudsonValley or @VAHudsonValley

Appointments

845.831.2000 ext. 7666 or 914.737.4400 ext. 7666

Medication Refills/Pharmacy

888.389.6528

Benefits Information

www.ebenefits.va.gov

800.827.1000

Manage Your VA Health Issues

www.MyHealtheVet.va.gov

Veterans Crisis Line

800.273.TALK Press 1 for Veterans

VISN 3 VA Nurses HelpLine

800.877.6976, Monday-Friday 4:30 p.m.-8 a.m.

GI Bill Questions

888.442.4551

Women Veterans Hotline

855.VA.WOMEN (855.829.6636)



Castle Point Campus

41 Castle Point Road
Wappingers Falls, NY 12590
Phone: 845.831.2000
Fax: 845.838.5192

FDR Montrose Campus

2094 Albany Post Road
Montrose, NY 10548
Phone: 914.737.4400
Fax: 914.788.4244

Visit any one of our sites for care!

Carmel VA Clinic

1875 Route 6
Carmel, NY 10512
845.228.5291

Goshen VA Clinic

30 Hatfield Lane, Suite 204
Goshen, NY 10924
845.294.6927

Monticello VA Clinic

55 Sturgis Road
Monticello, NY 12701
845.791.4936

New City VA Clinic

345 North Main St, Upper Level
New City, NY 10956
845.634.8942

Pine Plains VA Clinic

2881 Church Street, Route 199
Pine Plains, NY 12567
518.398.9240

Port Jervis VA Clinic

150 Pike Street
Port Jervis, NY 12771
845.856.5396

Poughkeepsie VA Clinic

Freedom Plains Executive Park
488 Freedom Plains Road, Suite 120
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603
845.452.5151